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SUBJECT: BELARUS WEEKLY POL/ECON REPORT - JULY 24, 2009

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¶1. The following are brief items of interest compiled by  
Embassy Minsk.

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##### Civil Society

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¶2. Another Opposition Activist From the 14 Is Amnestied (para. 2)

"European Belarus" civil campaign activist Mikhail Suboch, one of the 14 opposition youth convicted for participating in the January 10, 2008, unsanctioned entrepreneur demonstrations in Minsk, was informed on July 17 that he had been granted amnesty on July 15. Suboch had been serving a two year partial house arrest sentence. Of the 14 activist, one has had his sentence commuted by the President, two have been amnestied, and two have had their sentences reduced, and the remainder, with the exception of Dubisky, were either fined or are serving partial house arrest sentences.

¶3. The Only Jailed Member of the 14 Stops His Hunger Strike

On July 23, Malady Front (MF) leader Zmitser Dashkevich informed the press that Artyom Dubskiy, MF activist, who had been sentenced on July 7 to a year in a low security prison, stopped his week-long hunger strike after the prison administration had

stopped pressuring him "to write a request to be transferred to a prison to serve his sentence", and had provided him with relevant medical assistance, and improved his cell conditions. By law, a convict "may stay at the pretrial detention facilities until he receives a reply to his appeal". Dubskiy was charged with allegedly failing to comply with the requirements of his two-year partial house arrest sentence that he had received for his participation in the January 10, 2008, unsanctioned entrepreneur demonstrations in Minsk. Of the fourteen, Dubskiy is the only one currently serving jail time. Why he has been singled out for harsher treatment remains unclear. Dashuk, who had also violated the initial terms of his house arrest, had his partial house arrest sentence extend. During Dubskiy's trial his lawyer had asked for similar treatment, but the prosecutor, unlike in Dashuk's case, asked the court to sentence Dubskiy to a year in prison. The judge agreed.

#### 14. Jailed Volkovysk Activist Charged with Terrorism

On July 17, the press office of the Interior Ministry announced that Nikolay Avtukhovich, a former political prisoner, small business owner and critic of the government, and "other [unnamed] individuals" had been charged with terrorism under the Criminal Code's Articles 359 and 13. Avtukhovich, along with his jailed associates Yuriy Leonov and Vladimir Osipenko, have been held in a pretrial detention center in Minsk since February 8 for allegedly perpetrating a series of arsons and explosions targeting property of local officials as well as illegally possessing explosives and firearms. According to the medical personnel at the pretrial center, Avtukhovich was recuperating "well" after his three-month hunger strike, which he stopped at his lawyer's request so as to be able to assist his lawyer in preparing his defense.

#### 15. Christian Democrat Charged with Violating Draft Registration

A Mozyr district draft office, on July 21, charged Belarusian

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Christian Democracy party member Pavel Nozdrya for allegedly violating military registration procedures. Nozdrya was accused of "failing to promptly report" changes in his workplace and thus faces fines of up to \$50. He stated that this was the third time in two years that the local military recruitment office has charged him with violating military registration rules and called the charges "politically motivated".

#### 16. "For Freedom" Movement Activist Residence Raided by Police

On July 22, police in Pinsk searched the residence of "For Freedom" movement member Konstantin Chuvak. They confiscated CDs, political literature, and other printed materials and brought him to the precinct for questioning. Police produced a search warrant, but Chuvak refused to let them in, and they were forced to use a fire stairway to enter his apartment. The activists linked the incident to his distribution of independent newspapers at a local market. He was released later that day with no charges.

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Domestic Economy  
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#### 17. Lukashenka: We Will Never Leave Russia and Russia Will Never Leave Us

The media reported that on July 21 Lukashenka met with the head of Russia's Accounts Chamber Sergei Stepashin to discuss the interaction of the Chamber with Belarus' State Control Committee on monitoring the execution of the budget of the Union State of Russia and Belarus. More importantly, Lukashenka used the occasion to send a few signals to Russia. He vowed eternal love to Russia calling all discussion in the media amid the ongoing trade disputes with Russia "total lies and deliberate distortion of facts". Reciting his favorite "Soyuz" integration mantra "we will never leave Russia and Russia will never leave us"

Lukashenka did not forget to urge Stepashin to visit a milk factory in Minsk that was heavily criticized last week by the head of Russia's Consumer Monitoring Services Gennadiy Onishchenko for low quality. Stepashin was reportedly happy with the quality of tested milk products and promised to urge Onishchenko to come to Minsk and take a closer look at Belarusian products.

#### 18. Russia's Ambassador: Talks Regarding \$500 Million Loan Continue

According to the media, Russian Ambassador to Belarus Alexander Surikov told reporters July 17 that both Russian and Belarusian Finance ministries had confirmed that talks regarding the last \$500 million tranche of Russia's \$2 billion loan to Belarus were still ongoing. However, he made it clear that the difficulties with reaching an agreement laid with Belarus but he did not elaborate. On May 28, Russia's Finance Minister/Vice Premier Alexei Kudrin had criticized Belarus' economic policies as obstacle to progress. However, many independent observers believe Russia is sanctioning Lukashenka's for his non-recognition of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. The July 22 travel warnings issued by GOB warning its citizens about illegal entry (as defined by Georgia) into Abkhazia and South Ossetia was criticized by Abkhazia and the Russian press.

#### 19. Official Unemployment Creeping Up

According to official unemployment statistics posted by Belarus' National Statistics Committee, the number of officially registered unemployed workers had increased through June by 11.8 percent thus bringing the total number to 41.7 thousand people. That constitutes 0.9 percent of the country's labor force. Official statistics, however, do not count as unemployed the 241 thousand people, 6.8 percent of the labor force versus 1.7 percent last year, that have been placed on part-time work schedules or unpaid leave.

#### 10. Gazprom Expands Its Presence on Belarus' Oil Market

According to Prime-TASS news agency, one of the world's top 20 oil companies, Gazpromneft, which is 95.7 percent owned by Russia's Gazprom, established on June 30 a subsidiary in Belarus. Gazpromneft is one of the largest suppliers of crude oil to the Belarusian market. The company co-owns JS Slavneft, which owns 42.5 percent of one of Belarus' two oil refineries in addition to other businesses. In addition to the newly established company, Gazpromneft-Belnefteproduct, Gazprom has stocks in a number of other businesses operating in Belarus: Beltransgaz (37.5 percent), Belgazprombank (96 percent), Brest gazoapparat (51 percent) and Yamal-Western Europe gas pipeline (100 percent).

#### 11. Emergency Situations Ministry Suspended and then Resumed Operations of Russian Pipeline

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According to media reports, Belarus' Emergency Situations Ministry suspended on July 21 the operations of Unecha-Ventspils diesel fuel pipeline owned by Russia's Zapad-Transnefteproduct company because of the numerous technical problems with the pipeline. However, following a phone exchange between Russian Vice-Premier Igor Sechin and his Belarusian counterpart Vladimir Semashko, Emergency Situation Ministry's press service announced that the pipeline would resume operations at 11:00pm on July 23 as the company has allegedly submitted a new service and repair schedule to be implemented by the end of the year. The suspension came amid the ongoing "milk", "meat", "medicine" and other disputes shaking the increasingly frayed Russian-Belarus trade relationship and was viewed by many observers as the latest tit-for-tat.

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Quote of the Week  
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¶12. Speaking to Belarusian Ambassadors at MFA meeting July 23  
Lukashenka said:

"It is of principle importance that the European Union, guided  
by new relations with Belarus, and the U.S. Administration to  
seek to dethrone the existing government in our country".

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